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“Have You Written a Ford, Lately?”: Gender, Genre, and the Film Adaptations of Dorothy Johnson”

By Walter Metz

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In *Containment Culture: American Narratives, Postmodernism, and the Atomic Age*, Alan Nadel argues that *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valence* (John Ford, 1962) is a film which represents the Cold War American crisis over national identification. Nadel argues that the film responds to the American engagements with Cuba--the failed Bay of Pigs invasion and the Cuban Missile Crisis. Nadel argues:

The crisis in representation that emerged from the process of representing Cuba became inextricably implicated in the problems of representing the United States to the United States, to the Western bloc, and to the Eastern bloc as representative of the West. The same crisis of representation is thematized in the 1962 John Ford western, *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valence*, a film that in numerous separate ways examines the problem of representing the West. (191)

Thus, Nadel views *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valence* as a film which interrogates the national security component of the Cold War. I instead, following Robert Corber's lead, argue that the gender politics of the film are just as important as its national security discourses in determining how it is representative of Cold War culture. I turn toward the source of the film, a short story by Dorothy Johnson, to reveal the importance of the female authorial voice in assessing the gender politics of the film. I compare *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valence* to another Western film adapted from a novella by Johnson, *The Hanging Tree*, to reveal the contestation over gender roles rampant during the Cold War.

I. Introduction

This chapter argues that the auteur theory, the Americanized discourse of film authorship derived from the French *la politique des auteurs*, articulated most clearly by Andrew Sarris in the early 1960s, is an example of a Cold War discourse. I explore this claim by intertextually analyzing two Westerns adapted from the fiction of writer Dorothy Johnson: John Ford's *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valence* (1962, based on Johnson's 1953 short story) and Delmer Daves' *The Hanging Tree* (1959, based on Johnson's 1957 novella). Ford's film, quite famous in film studies because of his status as auteur, is rarely considered as an adaptation. Daves' film is rarely considered at all. Just as the discursive articulations of the Cold War coerced women to return to the home and abandon their work in public, the discourses of film authorship affected the status of woman's work in the film industry. As a result of the auteur theory, male directors received sole artistic credit, effacing the work done by women in creating the source material on which the films were often based.

Similar discourses of gender containment can be seen as we move from this metatextual level toward the two film texts themselves. While both *Liberty Valence* and *The Hanging Tree* were based on Johnson's fiction, only *Liberty Valence* was praised by auteur critics. Not coincidentally, the central female protagonist of *Liberty Valence* plays a minor role in the film compared to the two male leads, while the central female protagonist of *The Hanging Tree* sits at the site of discursive authority by film's end.

In “Printing the Legend in the Age of MX: Reconsidering Ford's Military Trilogy,” Ken Nolley argues, “I propose, then, to reconsider Ford's larger social vision here, though I think a rereading of his personal vision, perhaps by a feminist critic, is certainly in order as well” (82). While this chapter is not a complete answer to

Nolley's call for a full scale feminist re-evaluation of Ford, it certainly opens up a number of avenues of debate in this direction, including the way in which Ford's "vision" is informed by Dorothy Johnson's work.

Whereas the previous two chapters used Sirk and Faulkner as film and literary auteurs to interrogate the critical modes into which culture is hierarchically separated with respect to gender politics, this chapter looks toward examining the ways in which the hierarchies of artistic valuation are filtered through gender assumptions. I begin this work by exploring the ways in which various critics have theorized the female authorial voice within Hollywood cinema.

II. Theorizing Female Authorship

In this section, I offer a historical site for analyzing the gendered components of film authorship. This particular history of authorship in America will focus on tracing the often neglected contributions of women in constructing the stories told by classical Hollywood. I will attempt to contribute a theorization of the female authorial presence within the Hollywood film industry. I do so by using non-essentialist post-structuralist theories of the female authorial voice. I have no interest in arguing for an essential quality of women's writing that renders it somehow ontologically distinct from "men's" writing. Instead, I want to investigate historically the role of women authors in the development of American film, and the discursive reasons for their exclusion in the documentation and theorization of this history.

Roland Barthes declared the author dead in his famous 1968 essay, "The Death of the Author." However, it is no small coincidence that 1968 also marks the date of publication of Andrew Sarris' *The American Cinema*, a book which begins with a defense of the auteur theory and buttresses this defense by constructing a pantheon of directors Sarris considers great film artists. The two seemingly contradictory trends resulting from Barthes and Sarris continue to co-exist in discussions of the American cinema. At the theoretical level, post-structural film theory has replaced discussions of the author with ideological and enunciative considerations. Yet in practice, most of our film courses maintain the director, if not the auteur, as a figure of some significance. For example, an examination of most syllabi reveals that students are taught to identify films by director, despite the variability in artistic control behind this signifier. Despite Barthes' bold pronouncement of the author's death, like that maniacally persistent Liberty Valence in John Ford's 1962 film, the author keeps returning to confront and harass the intellectual Ransom Stoddards of film studies. Or, as Kaja Silverman more poetically writes, the author still maintains a "monumental" place in the field, arguing that the author "dominate[s] the theoretical landscape like one of the presidential profiles on Mount Rushmore, or the mountain ranges in a John Ford Western" (193). Silverman's link between the discourses of authorship surrounding John Ford and the profiles of Mount Rushmore brilliantly predicts the central argument of this chapter.

Robert Corber's *In the Name of National Security* works to link Cold War discourses of gender containment and national security. In discussing the Alfred Hitchcock film *Strangers on a Train*, Corber argues that the film creates resonances between discourses of homophobia and national security. One discursive

articulation of Cold War homophobia was that gay men were susceptible to Communist propaganda, and were thus a threat to national security. Corber argues, “Bruno is dwarfed by the size of the Monument, but his black shadow on the white monument creates a blemish on the nation” (72). If Corber’s hypothesis about the significance of national monuments is correct, then it makes perfect sense for Silverman to compare John Ford’s authorial position to one of the presidents on Mount Rushmore. Given that the auteur theory is a discourse operating in the American national security interest, John Ford and Mount Rushmore are both appropriate symbols of virile American nationalism.

In the 1970s, the attacks on the auteur theory increased as ideological criticism became dominant. By the late 1970s, the rise of feminist criticism largely influenced by post-structural theory meant a simultaneous move away from authorship and many “male” genres such as the Western. Increased attention to another genre, the melodrama, accompanied the move away from authorship. While this shift away from authorship and Westerns produced many useful advances in film studies, issues related to authorship were gradually discarded.

Many feminist critics have subsequently argued that it was no accident that the death of the author was declared at the precise moment at which women authors were first being seriously studied. A useful corrective to the wholesale rejection of authorship at the expense of the often neglected female author is to re-visit the films of Cold War American auteurs via a consideration of female authorship, as tracked via the adaptational transformation of fiction by women authors into films directed by male auteurs.

Theorizing an approach to film authorship might seem odd at this late date. However, we are currently in a vibrant period of re-thinking the status of film authorship. Two recent books begin to reveal a trend in returning to the Cold War American auteur: Barbara Klinger’s *Melodrama and Meaning* about Douglas Sirk and Robert Corber’s *In the Name of National Security* about Alfred Hitchcock. Both of these books, while methodologically very dissimilar, take their site of study to be a post-war American auteur, and grapple with issues of authorship in relation to the way subsequent criticism worked to construct the meaning of the films.

In addition, the very concept of the auteur, once thought abandoned as hopelessly humanist and romantic, is itself making a comeback. Dudley Andrew leads this neo-auteurist charge. Andrew begins “The Unauthorized Auteur Today” with the following bold comparison: “Breathe easily. Epuration has ended. After a dozen years of clandestine whispering we are permitted to mention, even to discuss, the auteur again” (77). Epuration, Andrew graciously tells us in a footnote, “refers to the period in France just following World War II when certain personalities in the film world were for a time forbidden to practice their trade because of hints of collaboration with the Nazis” (272). In this strange metaphor, we are led to believe that the defenders of the auteur were forced underground by a “ruthless” ideological criticism.

Whatever the terms of the metaphor, Andrew’s point is important: highlighting the status of the auteur is not as taboo in film studies as it was just a few years ago. However, there are clearly different ways in which one may reclaim attention to the auteur. The debate in which this paper attempts to engage concerns *why* one would return to the notion of the auteur. While Andrew claims that his paper proceeds “without trying to settle scores” (77), clearly the epuration metaphor attempts to place the defenders of the auteur as unfairly persecuted

by an ideological witchhunt. This implies to me that the score that would be settled (if one *were* going to settle scores) would be to return the auteur to a place of honor. There were very good reasons for “epurating” the auteur, among them the oppressive ways in which humanism assumes that the creation and evaluation of art is a process free of ideological constraints. Serious issues concerning gender, sexuality, and ethnicity were elided by the auteur approach, a limitation radically corrected by the advent of ideological critiques of the cinema.

I would hasten to resist this tendency to apolitically revisit auteurism. However, other avenues for the re-examination of the auteur remain open and largely unpursued. Klinger and Corber offer the beginnings of such a project. Klinger uses a metacritical approach to look not at the Sirk films themselves, but instead at their critical reception. Corber uses the authorial site of Alfred Hitchcock to ask historical questions about the relationship between Hitchcock’s thrillers and the discourses of the Cold War. In this chapter, I draw from Corber’s general insights about the Cold War, but move toward examining the metacritical placement of the auteur that concerns Klinger. In particular, I am interested in investigating the intersection between the auteur John Ford and the Western writer Dorothy Johnson. I argue that the artistry of *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valence* that has been attributed to Ford is deeply rooted in Johnson’s short story. For this project, to re-visit the auteur is also to theorize the female authorial voice within the classical Hollywood cinema, which has been systematically denied within most discussions (especially considering the work of women scriptwriters and female novelists from whose work films were adapted).

This chapter attempts to locate historically an analysis of women’s fiction adapted into auteur cinema. By selecting films from the early Cold War period, we can begin to ask historical questions about this adaptational process. The chapter uses the relationship between Dorothy Johnson’s short story and John Ford’s film as a case study of this process, but this case is by no means anomalous. A quick scan of Sarris’ top two categories of American auteurs’ films from the years 1948-1963 reveals eight such films based on fictional material written by women.

A number of feminist critics have attempted to theorize the female authorial voice within the cinema. In *Shot/Countershot*, Lucy Fischer brings an intertextual methodology to bear on comparing classical Hollywood films, which she labels patriarchal, against films of the feminist counter-cinema, which she argues are progressive. For example, in one chapter, Fischer intertextually compares Orson Welles’ *The Lady from Shanghai* to Mulvey and Wollen’s *Riddles of the Sphinx*, arguing that while both films engage mythic discourses in constructing the figure of woman, Welles does this via the typical castrating femme fatale, thus reinforcing oppressive gender mythologies, while Mulvey’s and Wollen’s film works to deconstruct and challenge those very same mythologies. While Fischer’s project refreshingly turns to the feminist author, her monological treatment of the Hollywood cinema necessitates her turn toward the counter-cinema. She leaves little room for a re-examination of the Hollywood cinema itself.

In the final chapter of *The Acoustic Mirror*, “The Female Authorial Voice,” Kaja Silverman uses psychoanalysis to theorize the links between authorship and subjectivity. This insight allows her to conceive of the author while acknowledging the post-structuralist deconstruction of the humanist conceptions of

agency. Drawing from Laplanche and Pontalis, Silverman hypothesizes that there exists in an author's body of works a fantasmatic scene, a scene where the author's desire is emplotted. This concept preserves the ability to organize a group of texts via the author, while at the same time resisting the return to a romantic-humanist conception of the author as conscious creator of the text. Silverman concludes the chapter with an application of her psychoanalytical theory of authorship to the films of Liliana Cavani, using Freud's "A Child is Being Beaten" to argue that Cavani's fantasmatic scene centers around the gesture of undressing.

While Silverman provides an indispensable model for theorizing authorship after the post-structural decimation of humanism, she like Fischer also ultimately turns toward the counter-cinema. What of thinking about the female authorial presence within the Hollywood cinema? In "Women in the Early Film Industry," Martin Norden has provided a useful historical examination of women's important roles as scriptwriters and directors in American cinema in the years before World War I. Norden rightfully concludes that despite these early important roles, "As the industry matured into a vertically integrated oligopoly bent on outmaneuvering the remaining independent factions at every turn, and as interest in women's themes declined, women found themselves squeezed out of many substantive positions at all levels of the business" (67). As the disparate elements of American cinema organized into the Hollywood studio system, the female authorial voice was efficiently and systematically silenced.

Are there ways of tracking any ruptures in this silencing mechanism? One way to study such ruptures is to look at adaptations of fiction written by women. One of the few essays to do so employs an essentialist strategy. In "From Vases to Tea-sets: Screening Women's Writing," Marilyn French studies British television's adaptations of work by Jeanette Winterson and Fay Weldon. French posits a relatively stable dichotomy between liberatory women's writing and the conservative, "male" mass media. French argues, "Deliberate ambiguity is a hallmark of the openness of women's writing, with its invitation to discussion and ambivalence rather than to acceptance of the closure of conclusion" (130). This chapter posits no such essentialist dichotomy between Johnson's fiction and the Hollywood cinema, but does argue for the historical effects of the Cold War containment of women's work, including women's writing. I am interested in interrogating the Dorothy Johnson fiction and its adaptations in order to position the historical treatment of women as authors by both the film industry and the critical community.

Other scholars have more profitably interrogated the relationship between women's writing and the Hollywood cinema. Tania Modleski's chapter "Woman and the Labyrinth," from her book on Alfred Hitchcock, *The Women Who Knew Too Much*, analyzes the relationship between the film version of *Rebecca* and its source novel, written by Daphne du Maurier. Modleski documents the ways in which the auteur critical establishment worked to construct du Maurier's influence on the film as a damning impurity that even Hitchcock could not expunge. Modleski quotes Robin Wood, who claims that, "the film fails either to assimilate or to vomit out the indigestible novelettish ingredients of Daphne du Maurier's book" (qtd. in Modleski, 43). In the case of the Ford film under study in this chapter, no such failure of the director to transform the feminine novelettish qualities of the source needed be explained. Ford consumed the Johnson

story, while the critical establishment swallowed whole his story that it was his. However, Modleski's work demonstrates that this case is not the exception: auteurism was able to denigrate women authors' contributions to the Hollywood cinema without argument.

The final chapter of Amy Lawrence's *Echo and Narcissus*, "Woman and the Authorial Voice," draws from Kaja Silverman's psychoanalytic model but moves toward a more historical method of analysis. Lawrence's chapter is an examination of Robert Mulligan's 1962 film adaptation of Harper Lee's novel, *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Lawrence sees the film as mostly working to contain Lee's voice via the strength of Gregory Peck's role, but does see the film's use of voice-over as a rupture in the patriarchal logic of the film. Lawrence sees Scout's voice-over, which begins and ends the film, as an inscription of the mostly hidden authorial voice of Harper Lee. While neither *Liberty Valence* nor *The Hanging Tree* employs the technique of voice-over, Lawrence's study provides a model for thinking about the ruptures in the classical Hollywood cinema's effacement of the female authorial voice. The contribution this chapter ultimately makes to the contributions which come before it is to historicize the effacement of women's writing within auteur cinema, arguing for this process as directly linked to the discursive processes of gender containment within Cold War American culture.

III. Dorothy Johnson's "The Man Who Shot Liberty Valence"

In this section, I focus attention on John Ford's 1962 film *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valence* as an adaptation of the 1953 short story by Dorothy Johnson. The film version of *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valence* is a faithful adaptation of Johnson's short story in terms of plotline. In both narratives, the story concerns Ransome Foster (Ransom Stoddard in the film, played by Jimmy Stewart), a young lawyer who is travelling west to pursue his career. On the way into town, the stagecoach Ransome is riding is robbed by the evil outlaw, Liberty Valence (played by Lee Marvin). When Ransome arrives in town, he befriends the town's tough but well-liked Bert Barricane (Tom Doniphon in the film, played by John Wayne) and his girlfriend Hallie Stoddard (played by Vera Miles). Indignant over Valence's violation of the law, Ransome meets Valence in a shoot-out. Apparently, Ransome kills Valence, but we learn later that Bert is the one who guns down Liberty, from a hidden position. Ransome goes on to become the senator of the state, and takes Hallie for his wife, leaving Bert to die in obscurity. In both versions, the story is told in flashback structure, with Ransome and Hallie returning to the town for Bert's funeral.

Despite having won numerous awards for her fiction, and having received favorable reviews in both the popular and academic press, Johnson is an unfamiliar author to most literary and film scholars. Johnson was born in 1905. She went to Montana State University and received her B.A. in 1928. In 1935, she moved to New York City and worked for fifteen years as a magazine editor. In 1950, she returned to Montana to work as the news editor of the *Whitefish Pilot*, a small local newspaper. In 1952, she accepted a post as an assistant professor of journalism at the University of Montana.

As soon as returning to Montana in the early 1950s, Johnson began writing Western stories and publishing them in magazines such as *Argosy*, *Collier's*, *Cosmopolitan*, and *The Saturday Evening Post*. In 1953, her first collection of stories was published in book form by Ballantine, entitled *Indian Country*. This collection contains the short stories "The Man Who Shot Liberty Valence" and "A Man Called Horse," both of which would be made into Hollywood films. In 1957, Ballantine published Johnson's second collection of short stories, entitled *The Hanging Tree*. This collection is dominated by the eponymous novella, which serves as the source for Delmer Daves' 1959 film for Warner Bros. starring Gary Cooper. Beginning in the 1960s, Johnson began writing historical journalism, for both adult and children readers, mostly documenting the hardships of the Native American population in coping with the invasion of white settlers. Johnson's work was well-received by academic and popular critics. She won numerous awards, most frequently by Western writers' associations for her short stories.

Despite this impressive resume, Johnson's contribution to *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valence* is almost unknown within Ford criticism. This is largely due to the rapid acceptance of Ford into the pantheon of auteurs immediately after Sarris popularized the auteur theory in the early 1960s. Sarris's essay on the auteur theory, "Notes on the Auteur Theory in 1962," and his laudatory review of *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valence* were both published in 1962. Johnson's neglect is an expected consequence in a critical milieu favoring the auteur theory. Based on the notion that the director transcended the material given him, the auteur theory established a tradition of neglecting the source, regardless of the gender of its author.

To suggest that the auteur theory has a privileged place within Ford criticism is not to suggest that people have not attended to many of the sources of Ford's work. A countercritical tendency which has at least begun to open up consideration of Ford's films as adaptations. The one Ford film which has been interrogated quite profitably as an adaptation is *The Searchers* (1956). Both Brian Henderson's "The Searchers: An American Dilemma" and James Van Dyck Card's "The Searchers: by Alan LeMay and by John Ford" use the adaptational and historical differences between these two texts to interpret the Ford film in terms of 1950s racial politics. LeMay's novel was published in 1952, two years before *Brown v. Board of Education*, while Ford's film was released two years afterward. Both Henderson and Van Dyck Card use this historical gap to discuss *The Searchers*' conservative approach to the politics of enforcing racial assimilation.

In "John Ford's Literary Sources: From Realism to Romance," H. Peter Stowell argues, "John Ford's transliteration of literature into film forcefully demonstrates the auteur's power to transform realism into romance" (164). Stowell's article uses a study of adaptation to reinforce the power of the auteur to transform the material presented him. This chapter, however, uses the adaptational process to critique the centering of the auteur, particularly in terms of the gender politics implied by Ford's transformation of Johnson's short story. An otherwise exhaustive account of all of Ford's literary sources, Stowell's article makes no mention of *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valence* as an adaptation of the Johnson short story.

In the entire corpus of film criticism on *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valence*, only two pieces of criticism--one by Joseph McBride and Michael Wilmington and the other by Lindsay Anderson--even mention

Dorothy Johnson's short story as the film's source. This is despite Johnson's fame among authors focusing on the American West. As noted an author as Jack Schaefer, author of *Shane*, wrote the introduction to *Indian Country*, the collection in which "The Man Who Shot Liberty Valence" appears.

McBride and Wilmington mention the short story only to declare Ford's version superior. They argue: One of the things which makes the film so much more suggestive than its source. . . is that Stoddard's memory of the shooting is put in a much broader context. In the story, Stoddard mulls over the events as he returns to town for the funeral, but he does not reveal the truth to anyone. Ford changed things so that Stoddard would confess the truth to society's watchdogs, the newspapermen. (188)

While McBride and Wilmington are correct in noting this change in the plot, they do not consider the different effect the Johnson story achieves. Johnson's story focuses on the disjunction between inner and public truths in a way that Ford's film does not. For example, in the story, when Stoddard first arrives for the funeral, the narrator informs us, "After the funeral was decently over, the reporter asked him [why he cared about Bert Barricune]. The Senator almost told the truth, but he caught himself in time" (90). I remain unconvinced that the film is inherently more "suggestive" just because it highlights the public versus private theme with the famous "print the legend" quote. In the story, the reporter is present, but Ranse takes his lie with him to the grave. Ranse's crisis over his role in history seems no less resonant because of this textual alteration. This is not to suggest that McBride and Wilmington are wrong in their assertion of textual difference. What is at stake in my refutation of their auteurist methodology is their assumption that Ford's changes automatically make the film "superior" to (not just different from) the source.

Lindsay Anderson also mentions Johnson's story, but again to buttress auteurist claims. Anderson tells us that it was a story that "Ford himself picked" (178). This fact is confirmed in Peter Bogdanovich's interview with Ford. Bogdanovich asks Ford about whether his sympathies lie with Tom or Ranse. Ford replies in a typically gruff manner: "I don't know--I liked them both--I think they were both good characters and I rather liked the story, that's all. I'm a hard-nosed director; I get a script--if I like it, I'll do it" (99-100). To his credit, Ford as much as admits the work was an adaptation, yet uses the opportunity not to talk about Johnson's material, but instead to inscribe his masculine position as a "hard-nose."

Even this brief attention to the source material is the exception within the Fordian critical corpus. No other critic even mentions Dorothy Johnson in his or her analysis of *Liberty Valence*. In fact, hard core auteurists like Tag Gallagher emphasize the pure *originality* of the plot. In a footnote, Gallagher takes the time to emphasize that with respect to *Liberty Valence* and *Donovan's Reef*, "the scenarios of both pictures were substantially improvised by Ford from day to day during production--*Liberty Valence* more so" (384n). However, the amount of improvisation could not have been that great, as the entire structure of the film, including the order of events, are transmitted quite faithfully from the short story to the film.

The question of what "faithfulness" means in a case of the transformation of story content from fiction to film is by no means an uncomplicated one. Here, I mean that the major events of the plot are all conveyed, and in relatively the same order, in both versions of *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valence*. Of course,

stylistically, the two narratives operate in very different ways. Peter Brooks' insights into the importance of plot is quite pertinent in rejecting the logic of the auteur theory, which privileges film style over narrative. Brooks' observations allow us to re-think the terms of analyzing Ford's film as an adaptation of Johnson's story.

The auteur critics work to emphasize Ford's stylistic flourishes in transcending the written source material. Many of the Ford critics have adequately demonstrated the visual brilliance of Ford's *Liberty Valence*. For example, Peter Lehman's chapter from *Authorship and Narrative in Cinema* argues that Ford's *mise-en-scene* inscribes meaning with respect to the characters' bodily positioning. During the frame story, Stoddard is vertical, while the dead Tom Doniphon lies horizontally in a coffin. On the other hand, in the flashback, Tom is the powerful one always standing tall, while Ranse Stoddard is often flat on his back, as when he is whipped by Liberty Valence.

To hijack a term from the auteurists themselves, John Ford is undoubtedly a *metteur-en-scene*, a skillful envisioner of story content within the medium of cinema. However, the logic of the auteur critics is to argue beyond this toward the director's artistic control over all other aspects of the film's content. It is here that Dorothy Johnson's contribution to the artistic and ideological complexity of *Liberty Valence* is completely effaced.

For example, the Ford critics have generally centered their attention on the film as an example of the progressive, revisionist Western. By this logic, the film is about the death of the West and the transformation in American culture that follows. Tag Gallagher argues:

Ford's Augustinian notion of man as pilgrim has been retained, strong as ever for the individual, but with an ironic touch, for the pilgrim has become a spectator of his own life, an actor in a play whose ending he cannot anticipate.... Memory is no less vital than present experience, as in earlier Fords, but now it tells far too many lies, and each lie, like each action, reverberates endlessly through history. The hero has gone into exile and been forgotten. (384-5)

Gallagher links the thematics of history and memory in *Liberty Valence* to Ford's authorial agency via an assessment of the entire Fordian corpus.

The problem with this is that such thematics of history and memory are the cornerstone of the Johnson story. For instance, Ranse in the story is very self-conscious of his position as a historical figure within the rapidly changing landscape of the American West. The narrator tells us, "Sometimes in later life Ranse Foster thought of the several men he had been through the years. He did not admire any of them very much. He was by no means ashamed of the man he finally became, except that he owed too much to other people" (95).

In the most self-conscious section of the story, as Ranse walks to the shootout with Liberty Valence, the characters are seen to be completely aware of themselves as actors in a conventional genre piece. The narrator describes, "This is the classic situation, Ranse realized. Two enemies walking to meet each other along the dusty, waiting street of a western town. What reasons other men have had, I will never know. . . . He was an actor who knew the end of the scene but had forgotten the lines and never knew the cue for them" (102).

Such self-conscious narration within the Johnson story leads us to re-think Lindsay Anderson's auteurist forging of the links between Ford and Brecht. Anderson argues, "Ford and Brecht were not as dissimilar as one might think. Both felt themselves to be in possession of truths--useful truths which they needed to communicate. Brecht called his plays Parables for Theatre. The Man Who Shot Liberty Valence is a parable for cinema" (181). What Anderson claims as Brechtian in Ford has its roots in Johnson's self-conscious presentation of the plot content of her short story.

IV. Dorothy Johnson's The Hanging Tree

The auteurs would of course respond to these analyses of the Johnson story with the claim that Ford himself chose Johnson's story because it fit his authorial vision. The questions that remain are, *why* did he choose this particular Johnson story, and what is at stake in the ways in which the films adapted out of Johnson's stories have been received by the critical community? To pursue the answers to these questions, I turn toward *The Hanging Tree*. This novella, published in 1957, was turned into a film by Delmer Daves for Warner Bros. in 1959.

The film version of *The Hanging Tree* is also quite faithful to the original novella. In both of these narratives, Doc Frail (played by Gary Cooper), a doctor with a mysterious and violent past, arrives in a gold rush town to set up his practice. A bit later, a stagecoach on the way into town is robbed, leaving a young woman, Elisabeth (played by Maria Schell), as the only survivor. The townspeople find Elisabeth in the desert after several days of searching. Elisabeth is brought to Doc Frail, who nurses her back to health. Blinded and afraid to venture outside, Elisabeth becomes dependent on Doc. The town's gossips begin to spread rumors about Elisabeth's relationship with her doctor, accusing her of being a "kept woman." One of the miners, Frenchy (played by Karl Malden), believes these rumors, and attempts to rape Elisabeth while Doc is visiting another patient. Doc arrives in the nick of time and kills Frenchy. The townspeople form a lynching party to punish Doc. Elisabeth comes to his rescue, overcoming her blindness and agoraphobia. Elisabeth angrily lectures the mob, finally offering them all of her money to stop the lynching. The greedy mob rushes for the money, and Doc is spared.

The fact that Ford's film went on to be canonized by auteur critics, while *The Hanging Tree* has been largely ignored by film critics, is significant. For one thing, *The Hanging Tree* features a strong female protagonist, while the female protagonist of *Liberty Valence* is accorded significantly less discursive authority.

Tag Gallagher, Ford's most strident defender, would certainly disagree with this reading of the gender politics of the film version of *Liberty Valence*. Gallagher argues: "'Wayne actually played the lead,' said Ford; 'Jimmy Stewart had most of the scenes, but Wayne was the central character, the motivation for the whole thing.' (One can also understand the film profitably by placing Hallie at its center) (390)." Gallagher never directly takes up this provocative assertion, but does argue for Hallie's significance to the film's end, when Hallie puts a cactus rose on Tom's coffin. Later, on the train ride back to Washington, Hallie's action has become the impetus for Ranse's introspection. Gallagher analyzes, "For Stoddard the cactus rose seems to have

awakened him to an aspect of Hallie--her love for Doniphon--that he had not before recognized (judging by his narrative), and perhaps, too, to an aspect of himself" (412). However, Hallie in this film, even at the end, is nothing more than a pawn for which Tom and Ranse compete. Even at the film's end, Hallie is a passive vessel, whose sole act is to belatedly act on her passion for Tom by placing a cactus rose on his coffin. Did she really feel strongly for Tom? Why? We do not really know because we are not allowed access to her desires.

By way of contrast, *The Hanging Tree* is one of the few Hollywood films I can think of in which the discursive authority of its central female protagonist increases as the plot moves forward, and crests as the film ends. In this respect, *The Hanging Tree* is a radical re-working of the politics of the woman's film. In *The Desire to Desire*, Mary Ann Doane argues that this subgenre of the melodrama is inherently conservative. In *Dark Victory*, for instance, Bette Davis plays an unruly woman, full of transgressive spirit. Early in the film, Davis is diagnosed with a brain disease which will first turn her blind and then kill her. Davis proceeds to fall in love with her doctor, who vows to devote his life to curing her. The film ends with Davis pretending to be well so that her husband can go to a medical conference and present his work to his peers. Davis succeeds in tricking him. He leaves and she dies.

Dark Victory works to punish the strong female protagonist, teaching her a lesson--blinding and death--for exhibiting strength and independence. However, *The Hanging Tree* directly overturns the ideological position of the woman's film. In this film, Elisabeth begins the film weak and afflicted. Halfway through, she recovers her eyesight. Almost immediately, she sets the overly protective Doc Frail straight, telling him that he will not be able to boss her around. The film ends with Elisabeth in the position of power. In the woman's film, the discursive authority is usually held by the doctor--his power attributed to what Doane labels the Medical Discourse. In the Western, the discursive power is often held by the Marshall or the cavalry. In *The Hanging Tree*, a quite bizarre generic hybrid of the woman's film and the Western, the discursive authority lies almost exclusively with Elisabeth. Unlike the traditional woman's film, Elisabeth becomes empowered and saves the doctor's life. And, unlike the traditional Western, Elisabeth fulfills the role of charging like the cavalry to save Doc Frail's life from the irrational lynch mob.

The film adaptations of the works of Dorothy Johnson pose a nice contrast in examining the ideological implications of the auteur theory, particularly with regard to gender politics. Consider the different evaluations Andrew Sarris gives to Delmer Daves and John Ford. Ford, of course is a member of the highest category, the pantheon. Sarris labels Ford the poet-laureate of American cinema, and praises the mythic dimensions and scope of his filmmaking: "As a director, Ford developed his craft in the twenties, achieved dramatic force in the thirties, epic sweep in the forties, and symbolic evocation in the fifties. His style has evolved almost *miraculously* into a double vision of an event in all its vital immediacy and yet also in its ultimate memory image on the horizon of history [emphasis added]" (48). Sarris' choice of metaphors here is particularly revealing. Calling Ford's changing style in the 1950s a "miracle" works to paper over both the significance of historical forces responsible for the development of the revisionist Western, as well as to deny the contribution of Dorothy Johnson to Ford's changed vision within *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valence*. Such a denial of

women's labor is not so different from the original "miracle" of Western culture, the immaculate conception. In that story, woman's procreative abilities are written-over, suggesting that Jesus Christ emerged from Mary's womb not because of her uniquely female reproductive abilities, but because of a miracle. It often seems that woman's reproduction--be it biological or literary--is explained away by patriarchal culture via appeals to mystification.

On the other hand, Sarris has little good to say about Daves, placing him in the category of "Lightly Likable": "Delmer Daves is the property of those who can enjoy stylistic conviction in an intellectual vacuum. The movies of Delmer Daves are fun of a very special kind. Call it Camp or call it Corn. The director does not so much transcend his material as mingle with it" (176-7). During the Cold War, it is no surprise that a film which challenges the gender politics of American society like *The Hanging Tree* would be ignored, while a film largely reinforcing the status quo like *Liberty Valence* would be praised.

Recent critical work on the Western has begun to rectify this inattention to Daves' work in general and *The Hanging Tree* in particular. In *The BFI Companion to The Western*, Julian Petley argues that "Daves' Westerns have never received their proper due in America" (335). Petley directly assaults the logic of the auteur critics by arguing, "It is as if he intended to create a vast tableau chronicling the evolution of the West, focusing not on glamorous, legendary figures and events but, rather, on more humble, modest and particularized dramas. His *mise-en-scene* is similarly varied, though its modest self-effacement has led to ill-considered charges of aesthetic paucity" (335).

Unfortunately, Petley does take an auteurist stance himself. Much of what is radical about *The Hanging Tree* is rooted in Johnson's story. However, Petley's point about Daves' style is important. Unlike the stylistically aggressive Ford, Daves' camerawork is understated, yet evocative all the same. Elsewhere, Petley claims that *The Hanging Tree* is "Daves' most complex and ambitious film and certainly his finest Western. . . it is a brooding, romantic, opaque work of great dramatic intensity and breathtaking visual beauty. The film is an almost explicit critique of the Bildungsroman schema that underlies so many Hollywood Westerns and has certain interesting parallels with Andre Gide's novel *La Symphonie Pastorale* and the 1946 film made from it" (266). Again, Petley places attribution with Daves, whereas it in all likelihood belongs with Johnson's story, since the film is a faithful adaptation of her story's content.

The links between the film versions of *The Hanging Tree* and *Liberty Valence* as narratives ultimately revolve around the authorial work of Dorothy Johnson, not around discussions of the directorial skills of Daves or Ford. This is where Kaja Silverman's post-structural theory of the female authorial voice is most pertinent. In order to rescue Johnson's contributions to American culture, we need to conceive of her as an agent in the production of culture. Instead of looking for Ford's or Daves' authorial vision, I suggest we look toward what Silverman would label Johnson's fantasmatic desire. Silverman begins theorizing female authorship by quoting from Laplanche and Pontalis' *The Language of Psychoanalysis*. They define the fantasmatic as, "that unconscious fantasy or cluster of fantasies which structures not merely dreams and other related psychic formations, but object-choice, identity, and 'the subject's life as a whole'" (Laplanche and

Pontalis, qtd. in Silverman, 216). Silverman works to build a theory of authorship which constructs the author not as a humanist agent, but as a subject constructed within discourse. She then proceeds to use the fantasmatic as a device which helps organize an authorial corpus. This is not a traditional corpus organized around the author's conscious choices, but a corpus organized around a discursively constructed "libidinal economy." Silverman continues, "One possible point of entry into the libidinal economy that helps to organize an authorial corpus would be through its nodal points. A nodal point might take the form of a sound, image, scene, place, or action to which that work repeatedly returns" (218). In the cinema, these nodal points are often visual gestures, as in the case of Silverman's authorial subject for analysis, Liliana Cavani. Silverman suggests that Cavani's nodal point is the gesture of undressing. However, Silverman also argues that, "the authorial fantasmatic can also be tracked at the level of the story" (218). It is here that we can begin to interrogate Dorothy Johnson's authorial fantasmatic.

Dorothy Johnson's authorial fantasmatic, I suggest, is centered around women learning, writing, reading, and otherwise entering into the Symbolic by mastering the usage of language. In both the short story, "The Man Who Shot Liberty Valence," and the novella, *The Hanging Tree*, the central female protagonist is responsible for the introduction of a school into the Western town. In "Liberty Valence," the illiterate Hallie convinces Ranse to teach her to read and start a school. In *The Hanging Tree*, because Elisabeth cannot bear to go outside, she begins teaching local miners how to read.

The establishment of the school is of course one of the centerpieces of Ford's version of *Liberty Valence*. However, the trope of opening a school within Johnson's fictions is completely effaced by Ford criticism, which attributes the image to Ford's authorial vision of interrogating the contrasts between civilization and savagery, West and East, violence and erudition. In "What kind of community have I come to here?," Peter Lehman attributes the importance of language in the film directly to Ford: "The Man Who Shot Liberty Valence concerns itself centrally with the things that mediate human perception and their drastic, inevitable consequences on community structure. Ford laces the narrative with vignettes on language both as a mediator and communicator of experience" (82). In this way, the criticism of the film at a metatextual level works to efface the literate contributions of Dorothy Johnson, much in the same way as at the textual level the literacy of women in the wild west is suppressed.

The theme of literacy is Johnson's authorial fantasmatic. Such a fantasmatic could have been produced by the pressures of a woman engaged in writing stories within a historically male genre, the Western. My project of locating Johnson's authorial fantasmatic and explaining it by appealing to the material circumstances of the production of her fictions is to historicize what for Silverman is a psychic construct. Johnson's stories concern women in the wild west taking center stage in demanding their access to the Symbolic. Johnson herself performs a similar authorial intervention in the writing of the Western. In addition, this act of literary creativity occurs within the discursive confines of the Cold War. At a time when women were being encouraged to reject public work (including the production of writing) in favor of private mothering, Johnson not only wrote but constructed fictions about women gaining access to literacy.

In making this argument, I am by no means arguing for Dorothy Johnson's fiction as a wholly progressive textual form in contrast to the male auteurs' conservativeness. That would merely serve to reinscribe the binary oppositions that I am attempting to break down. Quite to the contrary, I am attending to the contradictions inherent in all cultural production that would allow for the politics of dissent to be present in routine generic fictions, such as Johnson's Western stories.

V. Conclusion

This chapter has worked toward linking issues of authorship in two film-novel pairs of Westerns to discourses of gender containment. The auteur theory's effacement of women's work in producing fiction is complicit with the Cold War discourses of gender containment in the culture at large. The work on gender and authorship performed in this chapter argues that the auteur theory is a Cold War discursive apparatus.

In discussing Alfred Hitchcock's *The Man Who Knew Too Much*, Robert Corber forwards this hypothesis linking the auteur theory and Cold War discourses. Corber states, "The auteur theory, as it was elaborated by American critics and directors in the 1950s, was complicit with the emergence and consolidation of the national security state" (112). Later in the chapter, Corber defends this assertion with three lines of argument. First, Corber demonstrates that Sarris' brand of auteurism was "crudely and unabashedly nationalistic" (138). Corber quotes Sarris' "Notes on the Auteur Theory in 1962," in which Sarris evaluates the relative merits of the films of Alfred Hitchcock and Robert Bresson: "I am now prepared to stake my reputation, such as it is, on the proposition that Alfred Hitchcock is artistically superior to Robert Bresson by every criterion of excellence, and further that, film for film, the American cinema has been consistently superior to that of the rest of the world from 1915 to 1962" (Sarris, qtd. in Corber, 138). Sarris' film criticism contributes to the Cold War jingoism which places America as the center of the world both politically and culturally, especially in comparison to the Left-leaning, and thus suspicious, French.

Corber continues by noting that Sarris' version of the auteur theory maintains that auteur directors transcend the material constraints of the film industry. One of the ways in which Cold War Liberals separated themselves from their 1930s Communist personae was to reject theories of materialism. For Sarris to argue that truly artistic films are not bound to concrete historical forces is to participate in the construction of American centrist Cold War ideology.

Finally, Corber demonstrates that Sarris is a Cold War Liberal by focusing on Sarris' apolitical stance toward cinema: "Sarris contributed to the attempts of Cold War liberals to open up a space in American culture in which politics did not intervene. His elaboration of the auteur theory enabled critics to avoid discussing the ideological content of a director's corpus and instead to focus on whether it was stylistically consistent" (139).

Corber's three observations about the links between the auteur theory and oppressive Cold War discourses lay the groundwork for this chapter's argument about gender and John Ford. Corber does not mention the most stunning section of Sarris' "Notes on the Auteur Theory in 1962," wherein Sarris uses military metaphors. Using classical composers as his example, Sarris outlines his theory of authorship:

Let us say that the politique for composers went Mozart, Beethoven, Bach, and Schubert. Each composer would represent a task force of compositions, arrayed by type and quality with the mighty battleships and aircraft carriers flanked by flotillas of cruisers, destroyers, and mine sweepers. . . . As a single force, Beethoven's nine symphonies, outgun any nine of Mozart's forty-one symphonies. . . and Don Giovanni will blow poor Fidelio out of the water. (529)

Sarris's piece appeared in *Film Culture* in 1962. That same year, Ford's version of *Liberty Valence* was released. On the day of the film's release, May 24, 1962, the front page of *The New York Times* announced that four U.S. Soldiers were wounded in fighting in South Vietnam, but that all turned out for the best, because, as the title of the article declared, "Saigon Forces Rout Red Unit." Sarris' metaphors of militarism make perfect sense within the militarist logic of the Cold War. It only makes sense that a director of militarist Westerns like Ford would rise to the forefront as a great artist given the metaphoric criteria Sarris employs for his valuations.

On another front--that of gender--it further stands to reason that Ford's artistry would blow Dorothy Johnson's contributions out of the water. In his chapter on *The Man Who Knew Too Much*, Corber forges the links between Cold War discourses of national security and gender containment. Corber uses Dr. Spock's *Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care* as a quintessential example of the Cold War articulation of gender containment. In his chapter "The Working Mother," Dr. Spock explicitly argues against national day care as a solution for working mothers. Instead, Dr. Spock endorses giving subsidies to poor mothers who stay home with the kids. Dr. Spock works to scientifically banish mothers to the home, forcing them out of the public realm.

Corber reads *The Man Who Knew Too Much* as enforcing the same ideological position of gender containment. In that film, Doris Day plays Jo, a wife of a doctor (also intriguingly played by Jimmy Stewart), who gave up her career as an artist (in this case, as a singer) to raise her young son, Hank. At the beginning of the film, the family is taking a vacation in Morocco. While Jo is reading a fashion magazine, Hank wanders around a bus and accidentally pulls the veil off of an Arab woman's face. Corber argues that the logic of the film asserts that Jo's mothering is directly linked to the interests of national security. At this moment, Jo should be paying closer attention to her child, not reading a fashion magazine, because he might cause an international incident. More seriously, Jo had better stay home and raise Hank "properly," not work as a singer, or Hank will grow up to become gay and be susceptible to Communist indoctrination.

Similar links between gender and national security are present at the metatextual level as we come to understand the underpinnings of the auteur theory. The auteur theory argues that male directors are the principle sources of a film's artistry, thus effacing the work done by the novelists on whose work the auteur films are based. Since it was the case that many of these auteur films were based on the works of female novelists, the auteur theory works as a discursive apparatus to reinforce Cold War gender discourses. Just as Jo in *The Man Who Knew Too Much* is encouraged to give up her artistic career and raise children, so too is Dorothy Johnson's artistic work effaced by the auteur theory.

Pursuing the female authorial voice in Cold War America need not stop at the producers of fiction, however. In fact, the debate over auteurism itself was largely a gendered debate. We have already encountered Sarris' masculinist and militarist defenses of auteurism. This aspect of auteurism did not escape its most perceptive critic, Pauline Kael. At the end of "Circles and Squares," her response to "Notes on the Auteur Theory in 1962," Kael calls Sarris on his masculinist assumptions: Isn't the anti-art attitude of the auteur critics, both in England and here, implicit also in their peculiar emphasis on virility? The auteur theory is an attempt by adult males to justify staying inside the small range of experience of their boyhood and adolescence--that period when masculinity looked so great and important but art was something talked about by poseurs and phonies and sensitive-feminine types. (168)

Kael reinforces the points implied by Corber's discussions of Sarris. Namely, Sarris articulates the auteur theory within the logic of Cold War Liberalism. Kael notices that Sarris' approach emphasizes militarism and masculinity. To do otherwise is to endorse feminized values, values seen as dangerous to the interests of the American national security state because of the purported increased susceptibility of gay men and strong women to Communist propaganda.

Kael's point about the gender implications of the auteur theory leads me to my concluding point about the way in which I have intertextually related the film adaptations of *The Hanging Tree* and *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valence*. I critique the Ford and re-think the Daves in terms of gender politics by essentially re-writing the genre of the latter film. By using Mary Ann Doane's work on the classical Hollywood woman's film to argue for the "progressive" gender politics in both versions of *The Hanging Tree*, I expose these plots' melodramatic components which transcend their stable generic attributions as Westerns. This impurity in genre is what Jacques Derrida in "The Law of Genre" describes as the inevitable "mixing" of all genres (55). In most discussions of genre impurity, it is usually the melodrama, a form considered feminine and thus a "low" form of culture, that "contaminates" the other genres.

The tensions produced by the intersection of Western and melodrama produce a reversal in the way the plot develops its characters. In the "pure" woman's film that Doane discusses, the woman begins the film empowered and transgressive, only to be punished with blindness and death by the discursive authority of the doctor. In *The Hanging Tree*, a hybrid woman's film and Western, the woman character begins meek and blind, and becomes empowered as she regains her sight.

This chapter's movement from Western to melodrama actually mimics the development of film studies as a whole. The importance of the Westerns of John Ford to early authorship theories slowly gave way to feminist and ideological criticism, which focused on the melodrama. As a site for analysis to conclude this chapter about gender and authorship, consider the strange case of Tag Gallagher, John Ford's greatest defender in current film studies. In 1986, Gallagher's massive book on John Ford was published. The book's anomalous nature is perhaps best expressed by its title, *John Ford: The Man and His Films*. The same year as the book's publication, Gallagher published a letter in *Cinema Journal* responding to two essays about melodramas from feminist perspectives: Tania Modleski's 1984 article "Time and Desire in the Woman's Film" and Linda

Williams' 1984 article "Something Else Besides a Mother: Stella Dallas and the Maternal Melodrama." In the letter, Gallagher decries current developments in Film Studies:

Cinema. . . has become the victim of academics whose primary interests, training, and hopes for advancement lie in literature, communication, feminism, popular culture, psychology, linguistics, anthropology, or in something else. I do not mean to minimize the contributions these and other fields bring to cinema; but *rape is not a contribution*. Cinema has rarely been more than vicariously acceptable in American academic circles. . . and the effort to establish it has, unfortunately, *entailed its prostitution to other disciplines*. The result is that cinema studies is ceasing to deal with movies, and is ill-dealing instead with meta-theory, feminism, narrative, and what-have-you [emphasis mine]. (66)

Gallagher's hysterical complaint that Modleski and Williams have "raped" and "prostituted" film studies focuses attention on many of the issues this chapter raises. Gallagher's attack on the female critical authorial voice re-focuses our attention on the necessity of fighting sexism and misogyny at all sites--both historically (as in focusing attention on the Dorothy Johnsons hidden behind the John Ford monuments) and on the critical scene. While it is definitely unfair to link Dudley Andrew's reasoned re-visitation to the concept of the auteur with Gallagher's misogynist diatribe, some pertinent connections are worth pondering. Both Gallagher and Andrew argue for the return to a "purer" cinema studies, less encumbered by ideological considerations, more focused on the "meat" of cinema--the author and his film style. Given the reactionary assault on issues of gender and authorship voiced by Gallagher and the more centrist nudge voiced by Andrew, I could not be more convinced of the necessity of the project of this chapter--returning to the scene of the authorial crime and investigating the gender politics that we find there.